
**Public Safety & Emergency Preparedness
Committee**

SSB 5012

Brief Description: Directing the Washington state patrol to develop a plan to assist in the recovery of missing persons.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Judiciary (originally sponsored by Senators Kilmer, Swecker, Haugen, King, Sheldon, Marr, Kauffman, McAuliffe, Parlette and Roach).

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Requires the Washington State Patrol (WSP) to develop and implement an America's Missing Broadcast Emergency Response (AMBER) Alert plan to assist in recovering abducted children.
- Requires the WSP to develop and implement an Endangered Missing Person Advisory plan to assist in recovering endangered missing persons who do not qualify for inclusion in an AMBER Alert.

Hearing Date: 3/17/09

Staff: Yvonne Walker (786-7841)

Background:

The America's Missing Broadcast Emergency Response (AMBER) Alert plan is named after 9-year-old Amber Hagerman of Arlington, Texas who was abducted and murdered in January 1996. In remembrance of Amber, her name became the nationally recognized acronym for the AMBER Alert.

The AMBER Alert system is a system in which broadcasters, cable systems, and law enforcement agencies voluntarily cooperate to assist in finding abducted children. An investigating law enforcement agency may initiate an AMBER Alert if certain conditions are met; e.g., the agency must know the child is abducted, the agency must believe the child is in

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danger of death or serious bodily injury, there must be enough descriptive data available to believe that an AMBER Alert will help recover the child, and the incident must be reported to and investigated by a law enforcement agency.

An AMBER Alert may be activated directly by a local law enforcement agency that has either an approved local AMBER Alert plan or a mutual aid agreement with an agency that has an approved plan, or by the Washington State Patrol (WSP) if the local law enforcement agency does not have an approved plan. The WSP then notifies the Washington State Emergency Management Division which issues the alert to radio and television media through the Emergency Alert System (EAS). Radio and television media will then broadcast the information about the abduction provided through the EAS. This information typically includes a picture or description of the missing child, details of the abduction, the name and a picture or description of the suspected abductor, and information about the vehicle used by the abductor. The WSP also notifies the Department of Transportation (DOT) of the AMBER Alert, and the DOT places the alert information on highway traffic signs.

An AMBER Alert is initiated in abduction cases that meet criteria specified in the AMBER Alert plan. The main criteria are:

- the child is under the age of 18 and is known to be abducted (not a runaway);
- the child is believed to be in danger of death or serious bodily injury; and
- there is enough descriptive information available to believe that an AMBER Alert activation will assist in recovery of the child.

The Department of Justice AMBER Alert Coordinator and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children have provided guidelines for the states when establishing criteria for issuing an alert. As of 2005, all 50 states have adopted an AMBER Alert plan.

Although the AMBER Alert system is primarily for missing children under the age of 18, some states have also started "Silver Alert" programs for adults with a cognitive impairment who are lost. Silver Alerts are modeled after the AMBER Alert program and are designed to alert the public and law enforcement agencies to help look for and identify missing adults. These programs often are targeted for adults with Alzheimer's disease, dementia, or other cognitive impairments.

Although the AMBER Alert system has been operational for many years in Washington it is not codified in statute.

Summary of Bill:

The WSP must develop and implement an AMBER Alert plan that involves the voluntary cooperation between local, state, tribal, and other law enforcement agencies, state government agencies, radio and television stations, and cable and satellite systems to enhance the public's ability to assist in recovering abducted children.

The WSP must also develop and implement an Endangered Missing Person Advisory plan. This particular plan involves the voluntary cooperation between local, state, tribal, and other law enforcement agencies, state government agencies, radio and television stations, and cable and

satellite systems to enhance the public's ability to assist in recovering endangered missing persons who do not qualify for inclusion in an AMBER Alert.

Both the AMBER Alert plan and the Endangered Missing Person Advisory plan must be developed and implemented by the WSP within existing resources.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.